

(b) If agency counsel and the applicant believe that the issues in the fee application can be settled, they may jointly file a statement of their intent to negotiate a settlement. The filing of this statement shall extend the time for filing an answer for an additional 30 days, and further extensions may be granted by the administrative law judge upon request by agency counsel and the applicant.

(c) The answer shall explain in detail any objections to the award requested and identify the facts relied on in support of agency counsel's position. If the answer is based on any alleged facts not already in the record of the proceeding, agency counsel shall include with the answer either supporting affidavits or a request for further proceedings under § 14.26.

#### **§ 14.23 Reply.**

Within 15 days after service of an answer, the applicant may file a reply. If the reply is based on any alleged facts not already in the record of the proceeding, the applicant shall include with the reply either supporting affidavits or a request for further proceedings under § 14.26.

#### **§ 14.24 Comments by other parties.**

Any party to a proceeding other than the applicant and agency counsel may file comments on an application within 30 days after it is served or on an answer within 15 days after it is served. A commenting party may not participate further in proceedings on the application unless the administrative law judge determines that the public interest requires such participation in order to permit full exploration of matters raised in the comments.

#### **§ 14.25 Settlement.**

The applicant and agency counsel may agree on a proposed settlement of the award before final action on the application, either in connection with a settlement of the underlying proceeding, or after the underlying proceeding has been concluded. If a prevailing party and agency counsel agree on a proposed settlement of an award before an application has been filed, the application shall be filed with the proposed settlement.

#### **§ 14.26 Further proceedings.**

(a) Ordinarily the determination of an award will be made on the basis of the written record; however, on request of either the applicant or agency counsel, or on his or her own initiative, the administrative law judge assigned to the matter may order further proceedings, such as an informal conference, oral argument, additional written submissions, or an evidentiary hearing. Such further proceedings shall be held only when necessary for full and fair resolution of the issues arising from the application and shall be conducted as promptly as possible.

(b) A request that the administrative law judge order further proceedings under this section shall specifically identify the information sought or the disputed issues and shall explain why the additional proceedings are necessary to resolve the issues.

#### **§ 14.27 Decision.**

The administrative law judge shall issue an initial decision on the application within 60 days after completion of proceedings on the application. The decision shall include written findings and conclusions on the applicant's eligibility and status as a prevailing party and an explanation of the reasons for any difference between the amount requested and the amount awarded. The decision shall also include, if at issue, findings on whether the agency's position was substantially justified, whether the applicant unduly protracted the proceedings, or whether special circumstances make an award unjust.

#### **§ 14.28 Review by FAA Decisionmaker.**

Either the applicant or the FAA counsel may seek review of the initial decision on the fee application in accordance with subpart G of part 13 of the Federal Aviation Regulations, specifically 14 CFR 13.233. Additionally, the FAA Decisionmaker may decide to review the decision on its own initiative. If neither the applicant nor the agency counsel seeks review within 30 days after the decision is issued, it shall become final. Whether to review a decision is a matter within the discretion of the FAA Decisionmaker. If review is taken, the FAA Decisionmaker